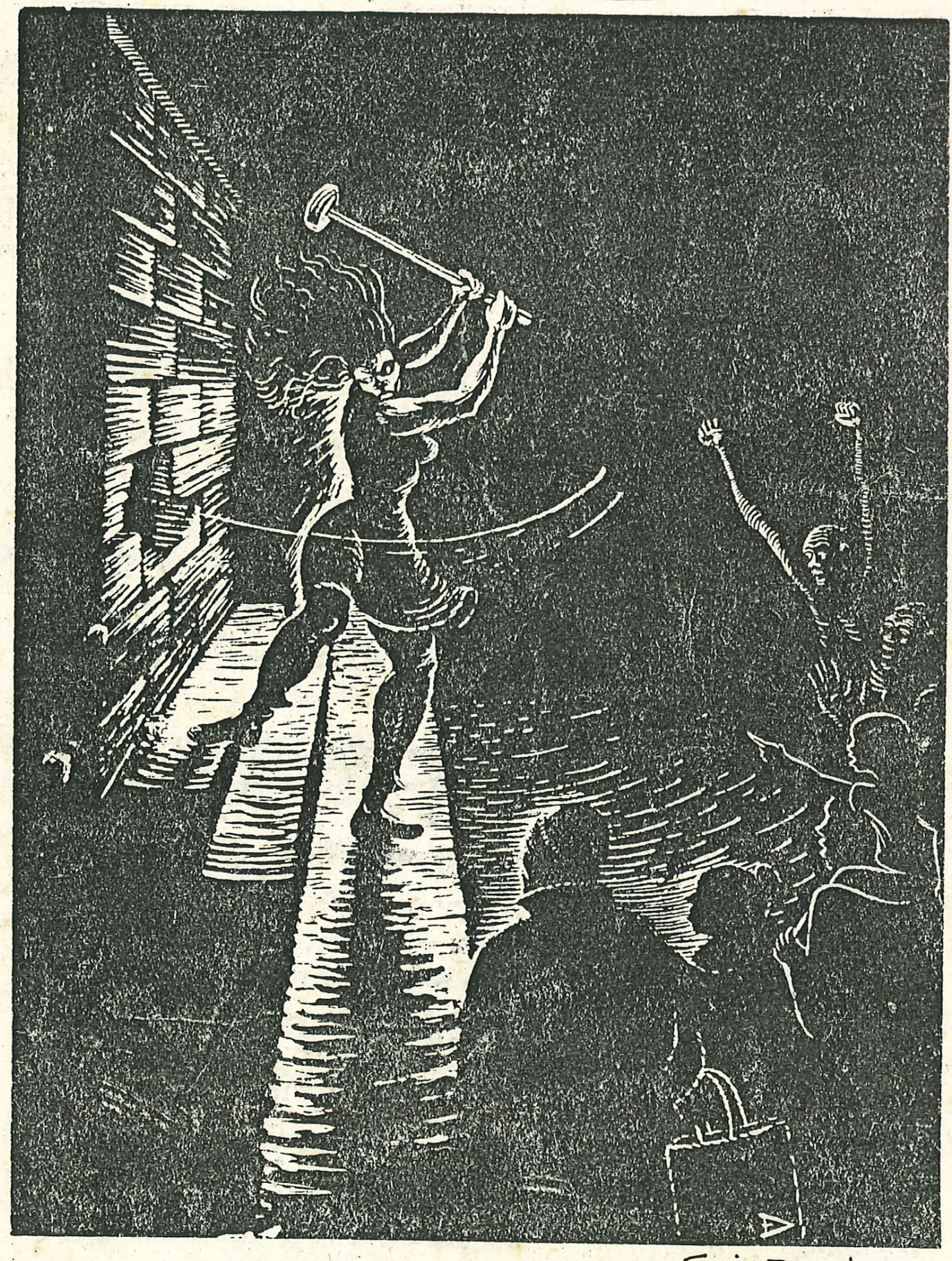
SYDNEY SQUATTERS HANDBOOK 1992



This book has been put together by a group of people concerned with the everyday survival and basic needs of people in our community
The group is called 'Self Help Housing'
Through this book we hope to provide much needed realistic information to people that need it

* We advocate occupant controlled housing
* We believe that everyone has a right to a home
* We see the present system of housing as creating homelessness and high rents because it is based on profit and property NOT people
* All land in Australia is stolen land from the Aboriginal people
* We believe that governments in all their forms hinder a real solution to the problem of housing the world's people

Unfortunately Self-Help Housing is not really happening as a formal group. There are, no doubt, squatters still all over Sydney. More unfortunately, thanks to arch bastard Max Raine (Real Estate agent), there are no longer any tenancy and housing advice services, apart from the tenants union, in Sydney.

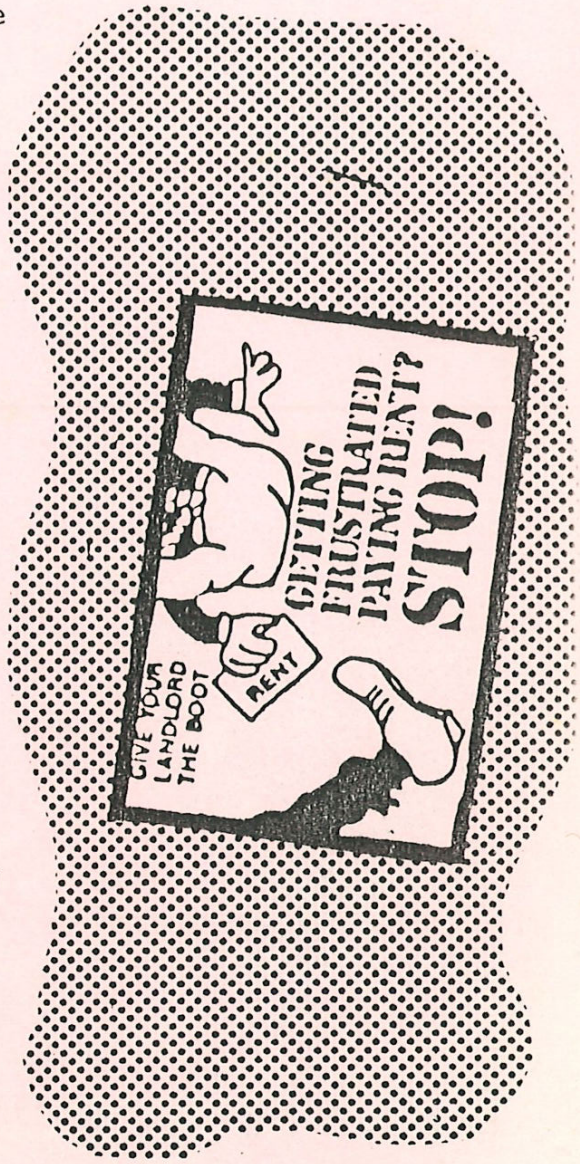
This is a much needed service and if we (or you?) get the time, energy and space to provide it on a permanent basis then great.

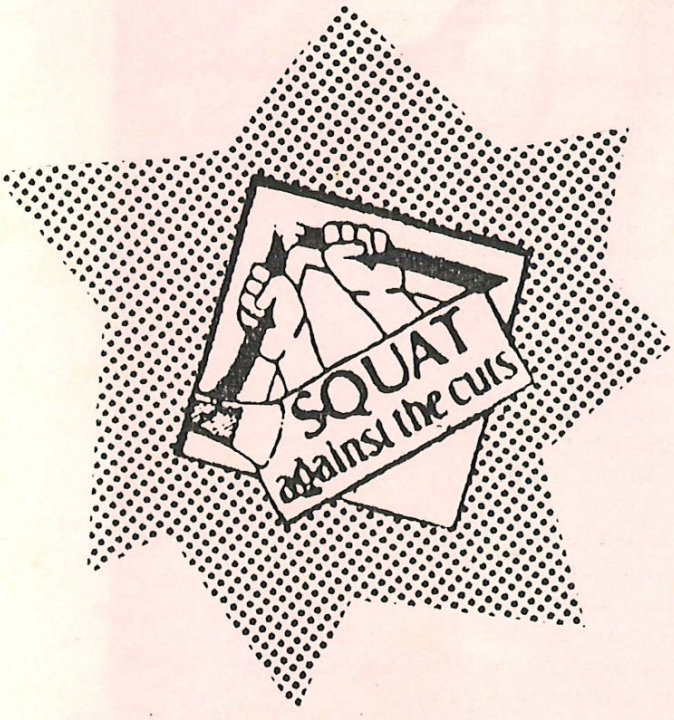
WHY SQUAT? why not?

Housing is a basic right for everybody. Houses should not be empty while there are people without homes to live in.How dare people let houses rot just because it is their property when people are forced to live in the streets.People are living without electricity,hot water and food in order to pay the huge rents that arse-hole property owners demand.NO RENT is affordable.Sqatting is in defiance of the profit system in housing.Being a tenant with a signed lease is no more secure than squatting.

Don't be fooled, tenancy laws are there to protect property owners not tenants!

Landowners can raise there rents every two months,you can be evicted with a weeks notice and every tenant knows how hard it is to get repairs done and the likelyhood of getting your bond back. Real estate agents discriminate against single parents,the young,the old,low-income earners and DSS recipients, so even if you could afford it,if you belong to one of these groups your chances of getting a house on the private rental market are almost non-existant.If you apply for public-housing you could be waiting for eight years.





What can we do as squatters?

We have almost no rights as a squatter because the law serves the interests of those with property and power.The only way to keep our homes is to be united and organised,to support other squatters.

Such support is essential to organise repairs and to resist harrasment and evictions by landowners.As a group we can also make the unions support squatters and their homes.

It is important not to be intimidated or bluffed into leaving your home before you have fought to stay there.

Who owns empty houses?

Government departments own thousands of empty houses.Due to property mis-management and profit motives these houses remain empty for years and years.

Private developers keep houses empty so that they are always available to sell when they can make a fast buck.Greedy individuals own houses that are left empty because they don't need them to live in but don't want anyone else to either.

GOVERNMENT HOUSES...

Publicly owned properties (such as those belonging to the DOH,DMR,Education Dept,Dept of Health,SRA,Defence Dept-yes,all these bureaucratic deptartments are ineffective and slow in managing their much needed houses). will require some level of negotiation unless they have been completely forgotten.
The time to negotiate varies but when you are discovered and requested to leave then an approach to a level of the administration influencing the decision cannot do any harm. (Query the rep as to who their boss is.)

The policies of the departments vary with which government is in parliament, but generally if the squat is given high exposure the departments may be embarrassed about the large numbe of empty public houses.

Privately owned houses...

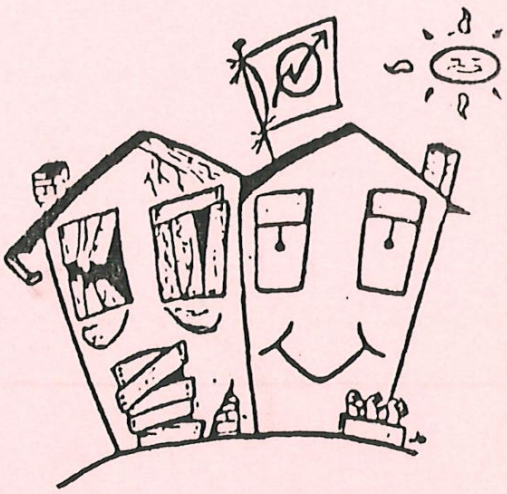
Privately owned houses may be left empty for a number of reasons. A deceased estate may have no interested parties, or they may be willing to allow you to "look after" the house till they make a decision. It is worthwhile to approach the owner as a responsible and concerned citizen.

Generally, private owners will merely ask you personally or get the police in to move you out. They usually couldn't be bothered with any charge procedures especially if you haven't been antagonistic to them or their property.

The occasional empty house may have been completely or temporarily forgotten (due to an owner with too much money or a deceased estate with no contactable relatives - administered by the public trustees office who may take years to settle the estate.) Hence you only have to contend with the neighbours. It is worthwhile to present yourselves to the neighbours as honestly and opoenly as possible.

FINDING YOUR NEW HOME

finding an empty space is easy-- it is usually unkempt;mail oozing out of the letterbox,overgrown garden power off (check if electricity meter is turning);broken windows etc.You should always knock on the door before entering or when checking out a space Often old people are living in their home without electricity.
Now you can take a closer look and check out the condition of the house -is there thick dust?then obviously no-one has been living there for a while;how many rooms,are there floor-boards,has the fusebox gas meter been ripped out? Now you'll know what you'll need to put it back together.



It is important to find out who owns the property-why?so you are as aware of it's past as your neighbours may be,and so you will know whom to talk to when you are threatened with eviction- the cops can not legally evict you unless the owner or a rep-resentative of the owner has said to. How do you find out? you can ask the neighbours general info.- how long has it been empty,do they know what's happening to the place,etc.You can also find out who owns it by ringing the local council "rates" section with a convincing story eg.you want to repair the mutual fence-use your imag-ination.You can also find out by read-ing the mail eg.water rates or electr-icity bill.N.B.-some councils won't give out this info.so you may have to pay a rate search fee of about $6.

The Land-titles office in macquarie st is another way to find out who owns the property. The system there may seem quite mind-boggling but it provides information on recent transactions and proposed deve-lopment plans.The staff there are quite helpful and you cannot be denied access to the information.

Squatting Kit ....

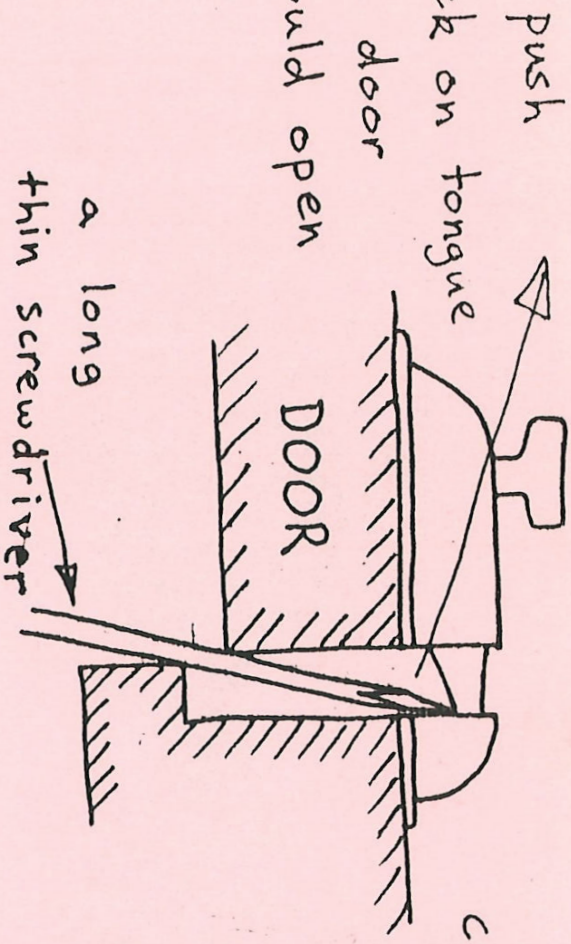
Torch or candles, sleeping bag, crowbar, hammer, screwdrivers, pliers, awl (for making holes for screws),lock, hacksaw blades, food, book, cards etc.

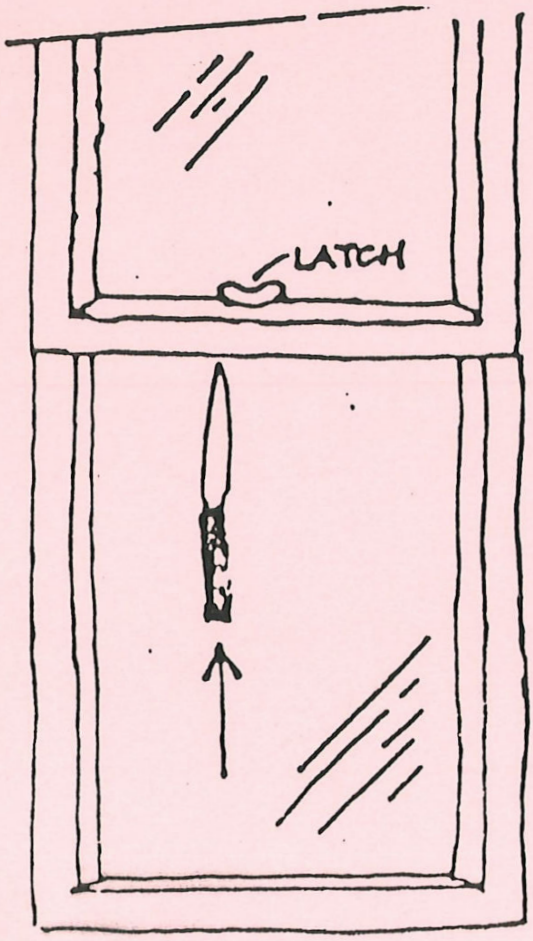
GETTING IN

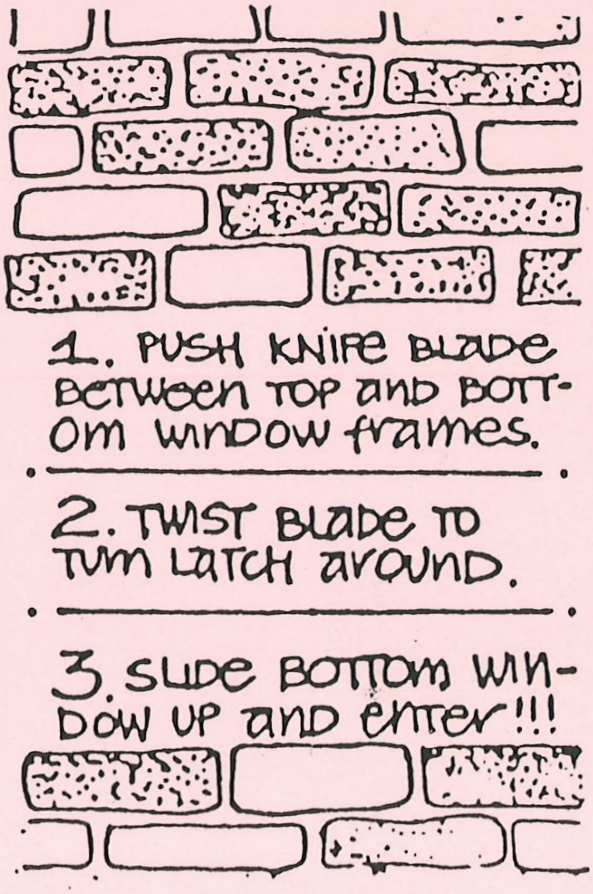
bring along new barrels for locks slide bolts,torch or candles,hammer, screwdrivers,etc.Crowbars are very useful but are hard to hide when carrying them.

Try the obvious ways first- look for open or easy to open windows or doors,skylights.Old style windows with rotating latches can often be opened by slipping the latches with a knife or piece of plastic (diagram one).If all else fails- we are sure you will think of some way to get in.

During the day on weekdays is often the least conspicuous time to try getting into your new home.A handy hint--stay calm and try not to look furtive.If you make a lot of noise it could be a good idea to leave and come back later in case someone calls the cops-to make less noise breaking a window-smear treacle on the glass and stick brownpaper to it to stop the glass falling.






1. PUSH KNIFE BLADE BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM WINDOW FRAMES.
2. TWIST BLADE TO TURN LATCH AROUND.
3. SLIDE BOTTOM WINDOW UP AND ENTER!!!

When your in

It can take quite a bit of time for owners to realise that there are sqatters living in a house,from a day to a couple of weeks.

This is a good time to get the house together,fix any problems with the wiring,plumbing or whatever.It is a good idea to get services like gas,electricity and phone put on as soon as possible.

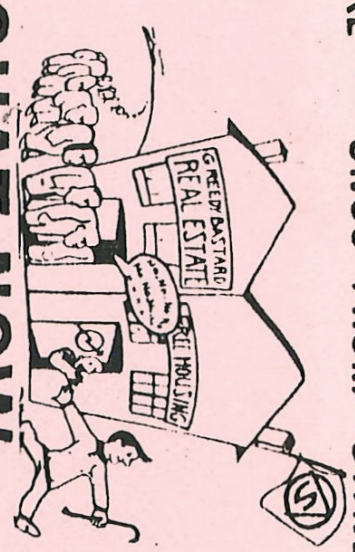
Try to keep the house occupied for the first few weeks and don't be alone,it feels safer with at least two people.

Get support from other squatters,people you know,unions,local residents.

If after one or two weeks, you're still there and had no news from the owners, you can start making it your home with more furniture. It's harder to evict established occupants than people with few possessions.

Remove incriminating tools when you've finished with them and tell the police or owner it was open and you walked in.

SQUAT NOW



TAKE THE ONUS FROM THE OWNERS

LOCKS-

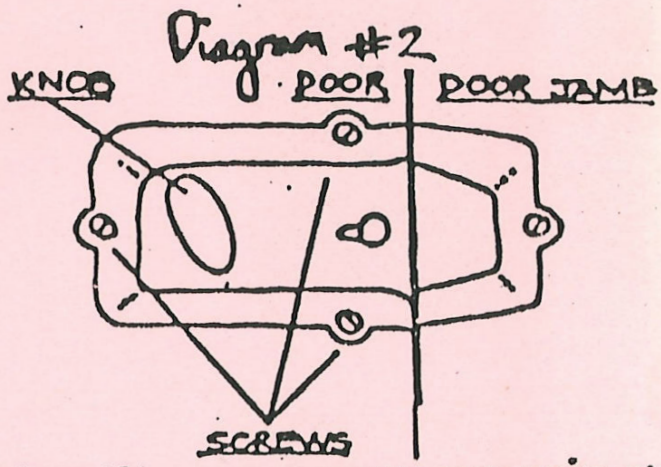
once you're in it's important to change the locks-all of them,and to secure the house in case the owner has a key on them.Most lock barrels are easy to change- you'll need a screwdriver,screws,nails and a hammer---(see diagram two)

Deadlocks need to be sawn off or crowbarred and replaced with a new lock.If you can't get a lock off - put a slide bolt on the door so the owner can't get access.For doors or windows that can't be secured with locks -nail them up with a wire grill or tin or board or whatever.

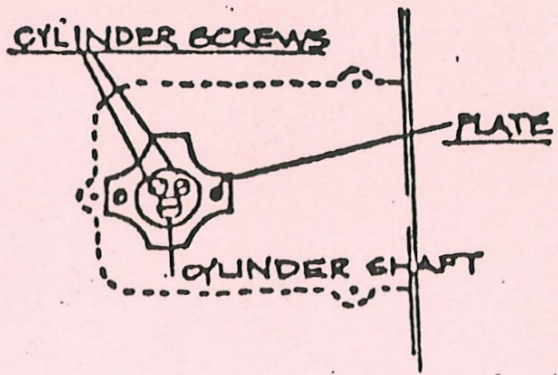
YALE LOCKS

The cylinder/barrels can be changed very easily. (see diagram 2).

Diagram #2



1. Remove outer screws and take off cover.....
2. Unscrew plate, take out cylinder.



3. Replace with new cylinder. If shaft is long break it off to same length as old one... and presto! You're home.

SERVICES-

water - if the water is off, the main is usually on a boundary - front or back, or behind the bathroom. N.B.- if the water has been turned off because the rates have not been paid the waterboard will reconnect it if you pay them as little as $10 off the rates bill- but, don't tell them you're a squatter.

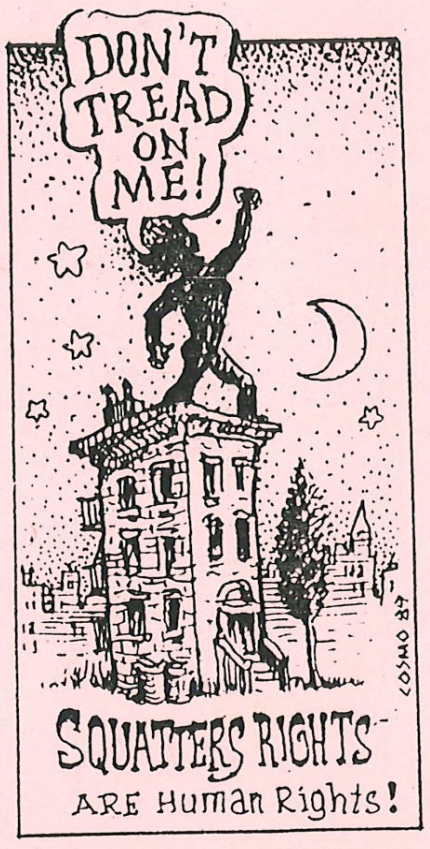
If the plumbing is in tact just turn it on. If pipes have been ripped out -- lengths of hose, clamps, and taps can be used for makeshift plumbing.

toilets -if there is no toilet you can cement one in. If there is no cistern -use buckets of water to flush until you can replace it. If t sewerage is blocked plungers may clear it, failing that, you can hire an electric eel. Take care of old sewers in old houses

electricity -you have a LEGAL RIGHT to have essential services connected. So, if your wiring is O.K. there should be no hassles. Sometimes you are asked to show a lease. If this happens, just stand up for yourself and insist that you have a right to have the electricity connected. It is not a good idea to tell them you are squatting. If you have to fix any wiring- take care-get someone who knows what they are doing. BOND money may be required

gas - the same applies - if all safe, they are legally obliged to connect you

YA KNOW... IT SEEMS TO ME, WE DON'T HAVE A HOUSING SHORTAGE...
...WHAT WE HAVE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF GREED!!
CONDOS FOR SALE
LUXURY APTS
PRIME RENTAL
COSMO



Some Useful Addresses

REDFERN LEGAL CENTRE
73 Pitt St, Redfern. Tel:698 7277

INNER CITY LEGAL SERVICES CENTRE
60 Oxford St, Darlinghurst. Tel:332 1966

MARRICKVILLE LEGAL CENTRE
9 Robert St, Marrickville. Tel:559 2899

TENANTS HOTLINE
Tel:251 6590

TENANTS UNION
68 Bettington St, Millers Pt. Tel: 27 3813

EVICTION!

you have no rights as a squatter but if you are threatened with eviction there are ways to postpone being thrown out or even to be able to stay there indefinitely. The owner or a representative of the owner only has the legal right to evict so don't be intimidated by the cops or neighbours and make sure you know who the owner is. It's important to try to talk to the evictors to let you stay as they may go away and not hassle you for years.

Many times youu will be told lies as to what is going to happen to houses. They will tell you that the house is to be renovated, sold, demolished or something else. Quite often owners will lie to you to get you out.

So don't just walk out if you are told get out by someone (though, if the police are there, you may be arrested if you don't leave.) Ask them what their plans are and explain your situation. See the section about public and private properties.

With government departments especially, you can use other means to pressure them into letting you stay for a while, or rehousing you.

SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO

*Contact your local squatters group for support.

*Get friends and other squatters to come round when eviction is due - people showing support can stall eviction sometimes.

*Leaflet all the surrounding houses about what is happening. Try to get local community support.

*With government departments like the housing commission, holding a protest outside their office.

*Barricading yourself in (This can be dangerous to your health though, as when eviction comes the cops are more full-on and arrest is almost inevitable, plus more charges.)

*Use the media to highlight the situation, though this can sometimes backfire, or they just write you off - so be careful.

*Basically you have to show that you have people supporting you. It pressures bureaucrats, especially if there are no plans for the houses.

* Contact local housing groups, tenants associations and community groups. They may be supportive

If you resist....

DEALING WITH POLICE..

If the police come, don't open the door for them. Talk to them through the door or letterbox. Tell them it's a civil matter between you and the owner.

Sometimes you can bluff them into thinking you are renting.

It's important to tell them that you didn't break anything. You just walked in as the house was open, and you haven't damaged anything since moving in.

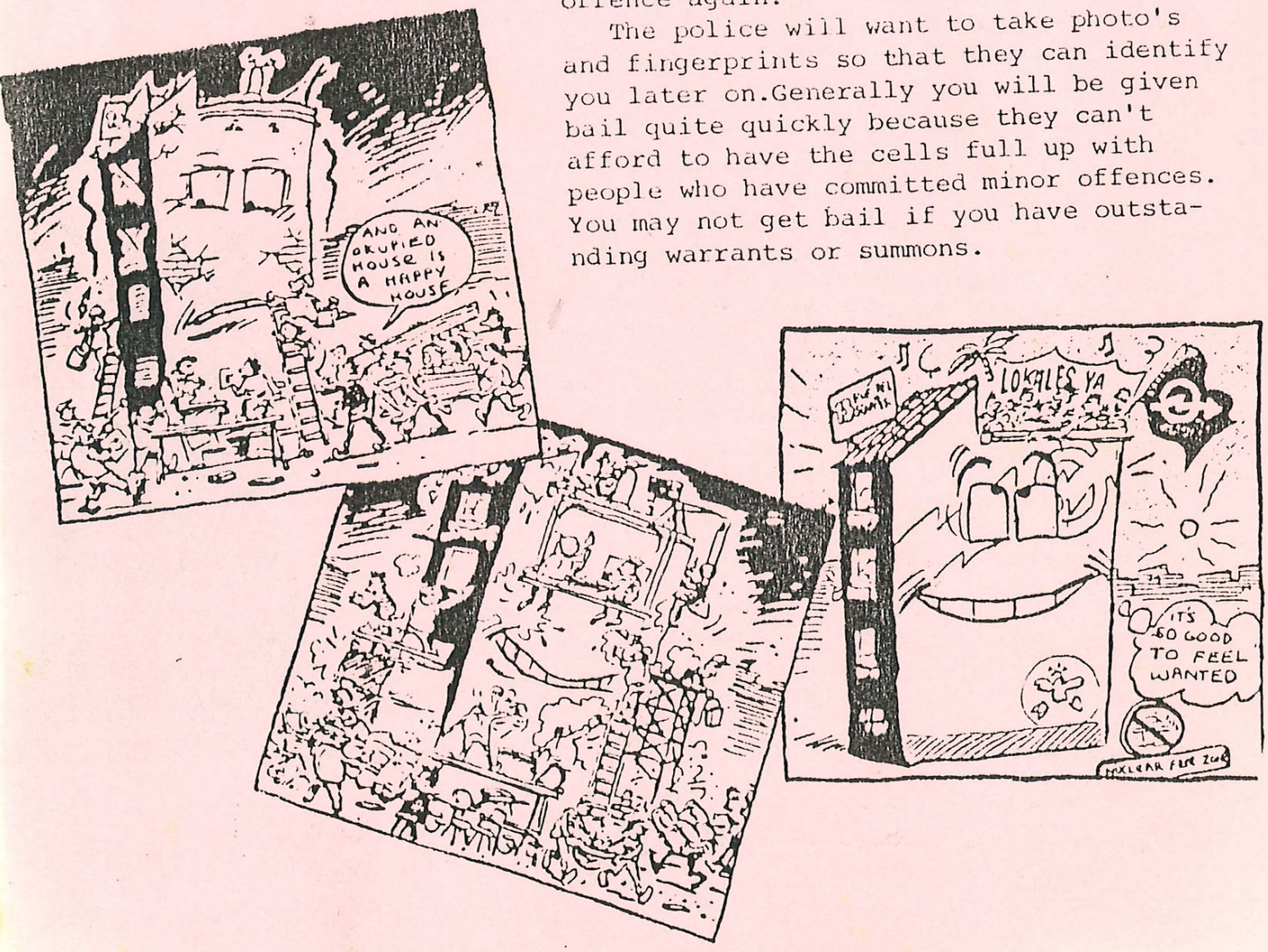
If you are told to get out by the owner or a representative of the owner, and you remain inside you can be arrested under the 'Enclosed Lands Act', which has a maximum penalty of a $200 fine.

If you swear or resist, you can also be charged with offensive manner while on inclosed lands - up to another $200 fine.

Other charges for resisting could include resisting arrest, offensive behaviour, assualting police plus others they think they can get away with.

If you are arrested you will be taken to the local police station and charged. They will want your name, and in N.S.W it is not an offence to give an alias to the police unless for the purpose of fraud, or unless you happen to be in a car a national park or a pub when asked by the police. Though you may be held without bail until the police or the magistrate is convinced that you will turn up to court, or agree not to commit the same offence again.

The police will want to take photo's and fingerprints so that they can identify you later on. Generally you will be given bail quite quickly because they can't afford to have the cells full up with people who have committed minor offences. You may not get bail if you have outstanding warrants or summons.



Sydney Squatters Handbook
By Self-Help Housing.

2nd edition
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anti-©
we are
contactable at
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Newtown 2042

----A STORY OF FRUSTATION AND MANIC DEPR-ESSION---- JUST HOPE THEY DONT KICK IN YOUR DOOR!!
LETS BASH AND EVICT SOME SQUATTERS
WHAT A STIRLING IDEA

The more squatters support and help each other the better the chance of all of us keeping our homes.